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Cover Page Footnote

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THE SIGNIFICATION OF CULTURAL MANIFESTATIONS IN THE DISCOURSE OF TOURIST GUIDEBOOKS IN MEXICO

Sara María de Lourdes Rodríguez Ortiz

Nowadays, tourism has become an activity that is part of daily life. Throughout the world, it is a goal to be achieved during vacation time. The development of means of transportation, productivity and travel facilities has led to an increase in the flow of tourism on a yearly basis.

Tourism is considered a healthy and recreational activity in our society that is also useful for our wellbeing and personal education. It is a practice that not only benefits individuals but which also enables a cultural exchange among peoples and economic development. Tourism is ultimately conceived as a field of natural and positive activities not worthy of being questioned. The conception of tourism brings to mind a world of fun, happiness and respite where pleasure is given and which is alien to social, economic and even intellectual problems. The world of tourism is precisely constituted to make us forget everything—our daily stress from manual or intellectual jobs—, and to escape cities plagued by smog and traffic jams, to leave ruts behind, and to get away...

From a different perspective, tourism has also been developed as an industry with the capacity of producing large amounts of money and of mobilizing the economy of a country. As such, its expansion began in 1940 and became the object of economic and sociologic studies that measured the impact of tourism in the balance of payments and observed its effects on employment with respect to the great phenomenon of accumulation and reproduction of national and foreign capitals.

The analysis of tourism from a cultural perspective within its social signification began in 1960. The works by Roland Barthes (1957) and H. M. Enzensberger (1965) generated a critical reflection of this area of human endeavor, questioning, among other things, the content of tourist guidebooks.

In Mexico we cannot undermine the importance this activity has had since the inception of the international tourist industry in our country. The 2007-2012 Tourism Sector Program states that "In the last 12 years Mexico has ebbed and flowed within a range of 20 million tourists per years and more than 140 million domestic tourist trips" (Secretaría de Turismo, 2007: 10). In this context, tourism is an object of study that may be analyzed from different perspectives at a cultural level. In this article I shall consider the social signification of some of the cultural manifestations found in Mexican tourist guidebooks—a topic

directly related to the area of knowledge in social communication.

REFLECTIONS ABOUT CULTURE FROM A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

First I will briefly examine several theories about culture to understand how cultural tourism is conceptualized within the international industry. The notion of culture in premodern societies did not differ from other significations, nor from categories of religion, civility, humanities, etc. It was not until the 18th and 19th centuries when the classic or humanistic conception of culture was developed by German historians and philosophers to establish a significant difference between culture and civilization. Culture designated intellectual, spiritual and artistic productions which manifested the creativity and personality of a people, whereas civilization was negatively understood as the courtesy forms and the refinements characteristic of courts.

Culture thus "...evolves around the idea of cultural heritage; that is, culture understood as a collective tradition of valuable and highly reputed works from an aesthetic, scientific or cultural standpoint, thereby leading to the concept of cultural heritage. Culture is a fundamentally historical heritage, constituted by works from the past, although unceasingly enlarged by creations from the present" (Giménez, 1980:4). Heritage so conceived is made up of a central axis: the fine arts. Culture is therefore the same as the fine arts, along with theater, classical music and literature, where the production of values forming this cultural heritage is always ascribed to extraordinary creators, due to their genius, charisma or talent. It was believed that contact with this heritage would enrich, perfect and differentiate individuals, as long as they possessed inborn attributes adequately cultivated to be legitimately consumed and enjoyed.

European heritage becomes a point of reference for the cultural meanings and values derived from Antiquity and the Christian tradition. Good taste and bad taste would thus develop, as well as the distinctive and the base, the legitimate and the indifferent, the beautiful and the ugly, the civilized and the uncouth, the artistic and the ordinary, and the valuable and the shallow.

Two important signs emerge from this cultural code, having to do with the new/old dichotomy, in such a way that what is genuinely old is more valuable or what is totally new is considered unique and original. The second one has to do with the divergence between soul and body, so that cultural goods are more prized

“the more spiritual they are”, the more they are associated with the domain of “interiority” and the less they approach the “material”; that is, “techniques or manual work” (*idem*:5). This concept of heritage or classis culture is highly estimable, easily structured in a hierarchical manner and biased, because it clearly identifies culture with legitimate culture. That is to say, with the domineering culture—that of the domineering classes or groups both nationally and internationally.

This idea is therefore exceedingly ethnocentric, in as much as it values culture as an essential and definite reference to the domineering culture of the time. This involves cultural discrimination, and this is why it is repressive and necessarily unilateral, giving way to a code of what is worth admiring, feeling and experiencing. This way of conceiving culture is consubstantial to the code that the international tourist industry has been developing, where the signification of value of places and objects to see is basically ruled by this discriminatory definition of culture.

By the end of the 19th century the *anthropological definitions* of culture had emerged. No longer evaluative but descriptive, they were essentially based on the idea of culture relativity and universality. The most renowned definition of culture was that of Edward Burnet Taylor, who wrote in 1871: “Culture, or civilization, taken in its broad, ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.” This descriptive definition was of a founding nature in the Anglo Saxon anthropological tradition and remained present for a long time in very diverse theoretical contexts, such as those of evolutionism, neo-evolutionism, diffusionism (Boas), and functionalism (Malinowski) (Giménez, 1994: 6).

In Taylor’s definition (1871), the purpose is to demonstrate a total conception of culture in such a way that there are no inferior cultures but equality, in principle, in all of them. In this context, cultural goods range from classical music to an arrowhead or a skull that gives way to a ritual dance. This definition likewise encompasses all of the forms of behaviors acquired or learned in society. “Culture hence includes all activities which express social habit and the material or intellectual products of these activities—on the one hand, the collection of customs and, on the other, the collection of artifacts” (Giménez, 1980:8). In a different sense, Taylor’s definition (1871) breaks the hierarchy of the superiority of material elements with respect to spiritual elements and the superiority of the old with respect to the new—the previously mentioned signs of the classical cultural code.

In the anthropological field we find the *symbolic conception* of culture in contemporary times, represented by the theoretical constructions of Clifford Geertz (1973). This outlook considers that cultural phenomena are intrinsically symbolic “...and the study of culture is mainly concerned with the interpretation of symbols and symbolic actions. The symbolic conception is an adequate point of departure to develop a constructive approach for the study of cultural phenomena” (Thompson, 1998:184).

In this conceptualization, culture sets up guidelines of significations that are historically transmitted and which materialize in symbolic shapes, encompassing several significant actions, expressions and objects with which individuals communicate or interact and share beliefs, ideas and experiences.

It is no longer a matter of describing and comparing cultural goods, because, for Geertz, “the study of culture is closer to the interpretation of a text than to the classification of flora and fauna. The attitude of the analyst who classifies, compares and quantifies is not as necessary as the sensitivity of the interpreter who tries to distinguish patterns of meaning, to differentiate hues and to make an effort so that life may be intelligible even when it already makes sense to those who live it” (Giménez, 1994:7).

Lastly, the *structural conception* of culture must be mentioned. Derived from the symbolic conception of culture, it had John B. Thompson as its main representative. “For [the structural conception], cultural phenomena are understood as symbolic forms in a structured context, while cultural analysis is interpreted as the study of the significant constitution and the social contextualization of symbolic forms” (Thompson, 1998: 185). This author is not interested in the study of symbolic forms *per se*, but in the way their sense or signification is associated with the different ways power is exercised, considering that power relations are systematically asymmetrical—a phenomenon that gives way to “domination”. In this line of thought, culture cannot be isolated from other social practices because it is just their symbolic expression.

CONFIGURATION OF THE CULTURAL CODE OF INTERNATIONAL TOURISM

Based on the previous review of the most relevant conceptions of culture, it is possible to derive and understand some of their features in the current system of tourist signs. As mentioned, the cultural code of the international system is fundamentally consolidated in the classic conception from the 17th and 18th centuries, as everything that will be seen and admired in a hierarchical manner and appraised from an ethnocentric viewpoint, in accordance to the dominant economic interests of a certain country or place. What is ancient and “spiritual” is overrated in different places. On the other hand, in Taylor’s anthropological version (1871) we find the practice of describing and listing cultural phenomena, something which is transferred to previously selected tourist itineraries or programs, as mentioned.

Regarding that which concerns the symbolic and structural conceptions of culture, the tourist code rarely collects some succinct and unfinished historical and social contextualization. This is why the dehistoricization of cultural goods is one of its main characteristics, with these goods being located in an ahistorical space devoid of memory, without indications of where they came from in their historical reality. We only know they are immemorial yet not rememberable. Consequently it would seem they lack an identity, or it would seem that this identity has been manufactured so tourists will not experience any contact with it nor have the ability to share it.

The characteristic of *dehistoricization* emerges. This is not an interlocution about a tourist finding the remains of the human beings who developed cultural expressions and the reasons why they did so, but the fact that pre-Colombian ruins, for instance, speak by themselves of the date, the place and the indigenous group who inhabited them. This is actually the global set design of a country which has an important reminiscence of the past and, regardless of its origin and sense, this set is relevant as a spectacle. According to Marc Augé (1977), it is as if the castles of Louis II had been built for tourists and not because of his expansionist ambitions. “In complex societies, tourism generates

cultural habits of several forms and breadths, doing so through a constant *mise-en-scène* of signs, means, boundaries that establish specific identities, and singular events. More than a social and economic component of the flow of travelers, it is a process where images, relations, signs and identity representations are constructed. It is not only experience, but also a group of discourses about the world within and without. It is based on declarations, it expresses beliefs, it makes experience objective in images and a meeting of the eyes, it invents styles of identity, programs events and places, while providing its distinctive motivations and systems of signs" (Simonicca, 2007:36 and 43).

Tourism develops a series of signs that surpass or undermine historic reality and it is with this that tourists trigger the cognitive and the appraising dimension of that wonderful world. "Visual iconography turns tourist destinations into paradises, oases of peace without conflicts, beyond time, where the visitor resorts to the exotic to escape the upsetting experiences of daily life. Tourists do not see the "real" Mexico when they visit Cancun or Teotihuacan, but settle for a pleasant and gratifying experience of the "hyperreal": reality diluted into images and representations that are experienced as real, or more real than real... What is presented to us as 'authentic' does not prevent it from being another simulation" (Lagunas, 2007:119).

And if we find a phenomenon of *dehistorization* of cultural goods, their *spectacularity* and *homogeneization* develops. *Spectacularity* amounts to the transformation of the cultural into a show. Tourists become alien spectators of what they see. Cultural places, objects and manifestations are coated with unexpected or unusual colors, format and brightness and, in such a way, acquire significations that do not belong to the cultures where they emerged, but become an economic and political interest to attract national and foreign tourists. This is also a way to legitimate leveled and ordered societies seeking validity worldwide.

However, this in turn leads to a phenomenon of hybridization in which garments, dances and rituals seem to be the same everywhere. The highly exaggerated colors of objects and subjects mark an indistinct appraisal of what they mean in an area or the other. What matters is the eye-catching set design of the spectacle and the attempt at authenticity of its components. In this way, "the cities to be consumed—since consumer objects is what they end up being—must feel to the tourist and the investor as kind, welcoming, cosmopolitan, although likewise historical, laden with a past and an art that endows them with venerability or, at least, with urban elements which are innovative or minimally associated with media or cinematographic imaginaries. Beyond the duration and depth of the gaze directed to what is presented to the tourist as interesting because of its uniqueness, tourism supply and demand manipulate a material that cannot be other than that which provides a certain image of authenticity...of what is genuine" (Delgado, 2007:94).

Cultural goods become "tourist attractions" or "colorful" objects to be shown at a given moment and which, in different terms, are no more than the "points of sales" that advertising and marketing use to sell any product: soap, lamps, ashtrays or any other edible or utilitarian product in any space of consumption.

And in this manipulation, which gives way to the spectacle, homogeneization emerges throughout the entire tourism sphere—a montage linked to dehistorization and spectacularity.

Homogeneization or standardization is found at different cultural levels: in tourism services, in the field of trip destination, in artistic expression and even in the social practice of tourists, as we shall see at the end of the text.

The tourism industry has set in a framework the rules with which all services must be governed. Firstly there is a standardization process in tourism management. A single enterprise has a system to perform the cost-based accounting of large hotel companies throughout the world and it even sells computer packages and programs to develop this kind of management.

This kind of homogeneization affects the supposedly beneficial impact of tourism, in as much as all enterprises have to produce very similar articles. This not only has an impact on importations, but also on the need to have high production costs in homogeneous articles, such as warehouses and industrial refrigerators, where the food that will be part of the standardized menu of chain is stored, etc. Homogeneization also encompasses all the usual products of corporations, such as matches, towels, soaps, etc.

Hotel facilities are based on a construction model of comfort that is massively reproduced. Hotel chains are careful so that their subsidiaries or the hotel owners will fulfill their regulations with the purpose of maintaining their brand image. These regulations include planning the natural spaces where the hotel will be built, leading to huge works of expensive infrastructure for the country and, in many cases, without contributing to regional development.

Hotel facilities and equipment are geared to fulfill the needs of international tourism, represented by the United States and Europe. This is why they respond to the modernity and comfort scheme typical of these regions, which will be reproduced in every country in the world. Transportation services and sale of food and beverages are also standardized according to these criteria.

On the other hand, there is standardization and classification of hotels with respect to the quality and quantity of services offered, measured by stars. Although all of them offer the same services within their category, hotel classification ranges from one to five stars.

The fact that five-star hotels include all the services —laundry, cafes, restaurants, bars, shows, candy stores, beauty salons, drugstores, souvenir stores, boutiques, car rental, tours, etc.— is because they follow a consumerist model of advanced societies. This has special signification in tourism, as it is the materialization of the vacation ideal, where the hotel has everything available so the guest will not have to worry about anything. The idea of modernity and comfort makes the guest feel he has escaped daily reality.

All this world of available objects leads the tourist to certain practices in relation to the world that he is surrounded by in those moments. If everything has been planned so tourists may live a reality unrelated to everyday life, the outside world then become a folkloric, fun and amusing reality, distancing the subject from the social reality that envelops him.

The food served in tourist centers undergoes the same levels of homogenization. "International food" cannot be absent from any resort lodging, both inside the hotel or in the small restaurants specialized in regional food. Hotel chains serve the same kind of

dishes all over the world; they have the same menu and each of them buys their products in the same place from a single business, which is sometimes also a foreign subsidiary to guarantee the same quality. On the other hand, this allows them to receive more benefits. For instance, “the steaks bought by all Hilton hotels throughout the world are purchased in Kansas City and shipped by TWA, controlled by the same owner” (Mattelart and Mattelart, 1979: 189).

This calls once again into question the rate at which tourism activates other production sectors, because it not only maintains this process for food but also for bath articles and, naturally, for all of the staff and equipment in the hotel. The standardization code is likewise applied when providing services. The behavior of the industry’s employees (waiters, chambermaids, receptionists, drivers, telephone operators, etc.)

follows strict rules, even if the institutions are very diverse. For instance, within restaurants, “most of the chains have their own management center for their franchise candidates, having established written regulations in the handbooks which codify, among other things, the behavior of waiters and waitresses. This serves as point of reference to assess their performance” (*idem*: 188). In addition to behavior, there is homogeneization in the way employees dress, wear makeup, etc.

The practice of tourist guides is also very delimited. “Tourist guides are meant to make the program work without complications. As a matter of fact, he or she is no more than a cog in the almighty tourism machinery. If something unexpected endangers the program, he is required to take the initiative by mending the plan the soonest possible to proceed to the next step. Parallel to this, he must mediate relations within the group and act as opinion leader to interpret opinions about the trip. His last role is decisively important, since somebody has to make sure that the program will be experienced exactly the way as it was sold” (Knebel, 1974: 144).

Lastly, a guide’s responsibilities are those of any employee and of any of the elements in the infrastructure of the modern tourist industry. The process of homogenizing the destinations of the trip begins the moment two fundamental goals are ascribed to leisure time: contact with nature and contact with culture as two ways of relieving the pressure from daily life and work. The tourism industry has therefore expanded by fulfilling these two goals and establishing criteria to delimit what is cultural and what is not, what is being in touch with nature and what is not. This is economically convenient all over the world.

Two types of product are thus produced and sold to the public, involving another level of standardization, as the industry’s agents sell exactly the same places and objects anywhere in the planet. This process implies a mechanism of cultural domination,

subduing to a reality manufactured with the criteria of the international bourgeoisie—from which this culture emerged and which it serves.

On the other hand, marketing studies classify and propose the sales promotion of certain tourist attractions according to each sector’s authorized characteristics, such as income, schooling, place of birth, age and gender. Once again reality is encased, circumscribed to standardized features as a result of market segmentation.

Another level of homogeneization deals with the fact that in these kinds of trips, the places and objects to be visited, seen and admired have been previously selected and classified. Therefore, the best natural environment for entertainment, the best beaches, and the best restaurants, bars, shows and sports have been chosen

for the trip which offers contact with nature.

On the other hand, there are specific cultural objects to be seen (museums, monuments, festivals, etc.) for the tourist receiving a package of several cultural features. “Everything is fragmented, evaluated, labeled... Tourist spaces and, consequently, the objects to be seen, become objects of cultural consumption” (Gritti, 1967:51).

Nowadays an attempt has been made to standardize the evaluation of tourist attractions, based on a scoring differential system, according to which a mountain, for example, receives a certain score depending on its height, location, the archeological ruins it may be close to, etc. This is also true for lakes, whose score depends on the fact that they may be used to ski or fish, etc. There is a classification for 34 tourist attractions, each of which has been evaluated with this system, ranging from what is strictly natural to what is cultural, taking into account hotels, restaurants, programmed events, folk festivals, churches, civil monuments, etc. This is then how reality is homogenized. From a world of possible objects, some are selected, trimmed and redesigned to constitute the tourism reality that tourists take in as reality.

This tourist reality is evidently formed by attractive entertainment and cultural objects—that is to say, objects with the purpose of making us forget our problems, social reality, economic reality, exploitation, history, etc. Tourist reality invites us to step in a different and exciting world where the history behind the actual conditions of existence is suppressed and where reality is experienced through spectacular images and shows. Tourist objects are made up of “colorful” landscapes, beaches where the sun and sea are bestowed with human traits and becomes fetishes of art objects, folkloric objects whose history is translated into anecdotes and funny stories. This sum of isolated, dehistoricized and fetishized manifestations collected into a travel box constitutes international tourist culture.

The code of places and things to see is necessarily imposed. To be a tourist, the tourist must cover this list of places and objects; otherwise it will be considered he wasted his time. “What is to be seen does not only deserve to be seen, it demands authoritatively



to be seen" (Enzensberger, 1965: 224). The code behind tourist activity is expressed throughout all of its discourse: in tourist guidebooks, in printed advertisements (posters, brochures, information books), in audiovisual advertising, in the itineraries or programs prepared by travel operators or agencies, in the discourse of tourist guides, in world events, in free promotional objects, etc.

In short, the main features that make the framework of the sign system of international cultural tourism are *dehistorization*, *spectacularity* and *homogenization*. I shall now consider the signification of handicrafts, dances, ceremonies or rituals and gastronomy in "cultural tourism". There has been a discussion since the 1970s about cultural tourism, centered on the fact that tourism impacts cultural expressions and enables them to be revived and recognized by all communities, regions or countries. Regardless of the fact that this line of argument involved research problems in concrete realities, it should be said that the production of these expressions is imposed by tourism in such a way that it extricates them from their social, traditional and historical signification. Once again, handicrafts, dances, festivals, etc., make up the "folklore" of a place, without men having anything to do with it.

Artists produce for a tourist market without knowing the meaning of their product in their culture, and if this process is found among the common people, it is enhanced in the tourist, for whom the handicrafts become souvenirs or remembrances that they take home as a sign that they were in a different country, that they were in a different cultural environment, even if they did not know it.

Mass production of handicrafts has modified their traditional signification in many places. In Africa, for example, "craftsmen develop trinkets exclusively for the mass tourist market, without any ethnographic value—masks that are senseless caricatures" (Saglio, 1979:322). In Tunisia, producers of traditional handicrafts changed the design and process of creation of their wares. They adapted them to the tourists' preferences once they saw tourists transformed their function, so that camel muzzles became handbags (De Kadt, 1979:68).

Handicrafts for the tourist market have homogenized the features of several regions or cultures in one same country up to the point where they no longer belong to any region nor to any tradition. A study about the impact of tourism on the arts and crafts in Africa says, "...there is clear evidence that some tribes have modified their production in accordance to the aesthetic values of consumers. One of the most relevant examples is the tourist art or 'airport art' of the Senufo, who live in the northern and southern areas of Ivory Coast and the Republic of Mali" (Schädler, 1979:148). This tribe exaggerated the features in their masks, combining various styles, to have them sold in airports as African symbols. Tourists then buy images of "mexicanity", "africanity", "americanity", etc., constituted as another "curiosity" and being, at the same time generalities and representations of tourist culture.

A level of re-functionalization operates in the circulation of handicrafts, due to the lack of contextualization these products have when they reach a store. They no longer belong to the folk culture; they have become "folkloric" appendixes of the national and transnational capitalist system (García Canclini, 1982:146). The placement of handicrafts in stores according to material, size,

etc., makes them lose the historic characteristics that are specific to each product, after having been created in a determined cultural context. Tourists encounter a series of "folkloric" objects manufactured in a country or in a state, without the least idea of who made them, why or what they are used for.

Along with the handicrafts produced on a daily basis for the tourist market, there is another attraction: antiques. These objects "... [are] not without function nor simply decorative; they fulfill a very specific role in the system's framework: they mean time" (Baudrillard, 1981:84). This time is sold in tourist stores as the bearer of a history nobody knows anything about.

Authenticity is another characteristic assumed by antiques, making it unique. These objects so fetishized circulate in the tourist market and are distributed by strata. Stores specialized in antiques summon the tourist from other countries who purchase the aesthetic-historical value as a sign of refined status. This differentiates this tourist from the others. Dances, festivals, ceremonies or rituals endure the same process of re-semanticization. Parties are taken to hotels or nightclubs, combining several of their elements or leaving out what is not attractive for tourists, what does not have much movement or color. This makes them lose their original purpose regarding wardrobes, color and their syntax.

Dance becomes an object for the performer, who also ignores the signification of the dance. He is a tourist among others. "Folkloric groups please these and those. Everybody enters the 21st century to the rhythm of the music, wearing Sunday clothes, as guarantors of both continuity and the show" (Augé, 1977: 66). Ceremonies, festivals or rituals also experience the significations with the cultural code of international tourism. In Bali, where religious ceremonies have been schematized and shortened for tourist presentations, tourist middlemen and dance group managers decide jointly what is going to be presented and how so, with the purpose of making it more attractive for tourists (De Kadt, 1979:68 and 70).

In Fuenterrabia, Spain, tourism made a popular expression change its meaning for the people who celebrated it. The purpose of this public rite, called *Alarde*, was to commemorate the victory of the people over the French in 1638; it was a form of social cohesion for the Basque people and an expression of their historical identity. This is why all the townspeople participated from its preparations to its completion.

When a hotel-restaurant-bar was installed in the plaza, where the main act developed, the townspeople began to feel they were acting for a spectacle and stopped helping out, until the government had to pay them to be in the ceremony, which had become a tourist attraction in the area (Greenwood, 1977:131). This is a clear example of how cultural goods lose their historical signification when they become tourist products.

Gastronomy, as mentioned, is standardized in hotels and is a highly exotic, colorful and a typical attraction which confronts the conception of authenticity but which tourist agents always seem to rescue. "Ever since there has been a tourist industry, it has always been interested in providing food to travelers and tourists. This is why its guidebooks present the most interesting places to visit along routes and circuits, together with information about hotels and restaurants where you can eat national dishes or so

called “international food”. Tourist-related institutions, however, have forgotten the history of their gastronomy, as well as the history of food in general. They have also become interested in gastronomy, without considering the traditional context of the food and have appropriated, used and presented it as a group of dishes, styles and plates from a series of regions; as a selection of representative food to create an international cuisine” (Barceló, 2007:211).

TOURISM GUIDEBOOKS AND CULTURE GOODS: SOME EXAMPLES

In order to discuss some examples of cultural goods in Mexican guidebooks, I will describe first the general structure and certain contents of this discursive expression, considering specifically the French *Guide Bleu*. The discourse of tourist guidebooks may be considered the first printed text where the previously mentioned code materialized. I will make reference to two European tourist guides, the *Guide Blue* and the *Guide Vert*, not with the purpose of extrapolating their contents to all tourist guidebooks in the world, but simply to observe how this way of choosing and classifying places and objects to visit will become seasonally institutionalized and will eventually rule tourist practice. On the other hand, tourist guidebooks are important because they cover several countries in the world. In Europe they are highly popular and they have become an additional symbol of tourist culture.

Considering that the organization of working and leisure time was an imposition of 19th century industrial bourgeoisie—a time when tourist guidebooks first appeared—tourists cannot waste time. The trip must be prepared so that they may see what is essential—the most important feature of all the reality he will be presented. “Owing to a strict selection that has voluntarily discarded everything that is secondary, [the *Guide Bleu*] includes everything essential; nothing but the essential... It is quintessentially a first-order historical and economic document. It is a summary of the library which is difficult to carry along” (*Guide Bleu*, 1979:6). With this discourse the goals that are specific to the trip are declared: a summary of reality is defined as quintessential, which is nothing else but the aforementioned described tourist reality.

To achieve these goals, the *Guide* divides a country with the criterion of what is necessary to see. “The country is wholly encased in bits of routes and by imposed stops. Time overcomes routes; cultural interest overcomes tourist stops” (Gritti, 1967:54). So the tourist may see the “quintessential tourism”, the *Guide Bleu* selects the “curiosities” that must be seen: ++ designates a first rate curiosity, while + designates an interesting one. The term “curiosity” is very significant in this discourse, as it suggests a series of objects that go beyond normality. This is what tourist objects will actually become: objects extracted from the reality which produces them.

A study by Bernard Lerivray (1975) about these guidebooks describes clearly that the sights to be seen in an area are found under the category for “monumental and artistic curiosities” (churches, abbeys, castles, and museums) and the category for “natural and colorful curiosities” (landscapes, cliffs or canyons, and waterfalls). “Monumental and artistic curiosities”, which express the “aesthetic existence” criticized by Roland Barthes (1957), the quintessence of culture, are made up of a series of antiques from a past that concludes in the 18th century, because

references to the following centuries are practically scarce.

Tourist culture therefore amounts to learning the name of the monument and the century when it was built. “... the humanity of a country disappears for the exclusive sake of its monuments” (Barthes, 1957:122). These objects are mainly religious, “because, from the bourgeois standpoint, it is impossible to conceive a History of Art that is not Catholic or Christian. Christianity is the first supplier of tourism and trips are made only to visit churches” (*idem*: 123). Museums, in turn, are structured as an accumulation of merchandise. In this sense, churches are more interesting because of the museum pieces they contain.

The history of man is not shown. The description of human beings is based on a typology that confers them an essential characteristic. “In Spain, for instance, Basques are adventurous sailors; Levantines, happy gardeners; Catalonians, able shopkeepers” (*idem*: 122). This way of encasing men into stereotypes makes them become part of the decoration of the landscape and the historical places, clearly expressing the process of fetishization that governs the whole conception of tourism.

The discourse of history in these guidebooks reinforces this process, as their narrations revolve around a summation of anecdotal and sensationalist facts, which are isolated from the economic and social context. The main characters are conceived as heroes who, after overcoming great obstacles, have a happy ending. Each guidebook includes a story about a city as “an anecdotal account of rather sensationalist dimensions, where the guidebook does not play the role of a true historian but of a story teller” (Lerivray, 1975: 101).

The *Guide Bleu* has another feature: it describes the history of a place based on its battles, commending the courage of the soldiers and their military virtue. Everything that favors national unity, everything that contributes to order is praised, whereas rebellions, disturbances and lootings are considered in a negative way, so that “fondness for the native land, love for the fatherland, armed victory, development due to consecutive monarchies...are all characteristics that embellish historical narratives in the *Guide Bleu* and make the history of each city glorious” (*idem*: 107).

Nineteenth-century guidebooks have changed because of the means of communication that were developed in the 20th century, but the criteria of what to visit are the same and, as can be seen, their discourse is not exclusive, it is part of the language of the tourism code. Tourism guidebooks today include a large number of photographs. In the words of David Lagunas, “Tourism is definitely one of those scenarios where culture is used as a support for visual iconography. And this visibility alters contemporary landscapes and turns them into a series of images that communicate symbolic and political economic strategies in the construction of local, regional and national identity” (2007:119).

For the following examples I used guidebooks for Mexican states that are part of the collection “Viaja con tu Guía” (Travel with your Guide), published by Telmex, and some of the guidebooks published by México Desconocido, with the title of “Rutas Turísticas” (“Tourist Routes”), since the “Guías Roji”, which used to be so popular in the Mexican market, are no longer published.

Ocumicho, Michoacán:

"Two kilometers before getting to Ocumicho you will find San José de Gracia, a series of houses on one side of the road that reserve a surprise: their incomparable glazed earthenware, which is an authentic creation of elaborate small pieces glued in meticulous order, following all kinds of shapes, until the pot is entirely covered and turns into the famous 'pineapples'.

Further on, on a large soft meadow spreading towards the skirts of the sierra you will find Ocumicho, a town already mentioned as reference point in several document from the mid-16th century. It is known that the townspeople used to manufacture shoes but started working with clay in the 20th century. In the 1960s, besides making whistles, they started to create 'little devils'. Tradition says that Marcelino Vicente was the first one to make these curious figurines. As with other expressions, current topics are echoed in popular art, so parodies of political or fashion celebrities are not rare, or even hollowed clay hens concealing erotic scenes.

Ocumicho celebrates its Patron Saint, Saint Peter, with a festival on June 29. On that day, besides a procession, the Moor dance is performed and a handicrafts contest is held. The Temple of Saint Peter and Saint Paul and the Huatápera Handicrafts Museum are the main monuments in Ocumicho. The temple has preserved the atrium and stone cross with its embedded pieces of obsidian, proof of Indigenous and Christian syncretism" (*Viaja con tu Guía*, 2006:109).

Celaya, Guanajuato:

"Independence Column: Corinthian column displaying at its height an eagle with spanned wings, surrounded by several war contraptions, such as a pair of spears, rifles, a cannon, the *Trigarante* flag and a drum. In the pedestal there are four large vases—details very much liked by the column's author, Francisco Eduardo Tresguerras. The column was ordered to commemorate the arrival to the throne of Spain of Charles IV. Years later, however, the artist had the bust of Charles IV removed to replace it with the triumphant eagle which he sculpted in stone quarry. It is said that the sculpture was replaced during Porfirio Díaz' time and that the current eagle is made of bronze and stands in the same pose as the former one" (*Rutas Turísticas*, 2005:57).

SPECTACULARITY**Cuernavaca, Morelos:**

"This elegant hotel and restaurant is located two kilometers to the south. It was originally the Hacienda de San Antonio Atlacomulco, founded by Hernán Cortés. In the 16th and 17th centuries, it was one of the main sugar cane mills in New Spain. It experienced a boom again in the 19th century, when politician and industrialist Lucas Alamán became its manager and modernized it. With the Mexican Revolution, the Hacienda lost its lands and only its manor survived.

The place is spectacular. Some parts have been totally refurbished and are now used as hotel rooms. Others have been partially redesigned and therefore preserve their old and ruin-like ambience" (*Rutas Turísticas*, 2006:18).

Taxco, Guerrero:

"There are beloved cities, cities that you love even more when you remember them. They are earthly paradises situated between reality and fantasy. Taxco is one of these cities. Walking through its streets is strolling in the edge between a real city and a dreamed city. Taxco could be the capital of the spirit. Under a beaming sky that does not lose its luminosity on moon nights, it displays its extremely white facades, softened by reddish roof tiles and ash-gray cobblestones. Toussaint called it 'a proud city raised on a baroque silver pedestal'" (*Viaja con tu Guía*, 2005: 58).

Plazuela de los Sapos, Puebla:

"This small square, already present in urban plans from the 18th century, has three commercial roles. On weekday mornings it is a market of skilled labor, where laborers, house painters and other artisans meet to look for a job, as do those who require their services. At night it becomes a mariachi market, where those who enjoy or suffer because their love has been reciprocated or unrequited hire the trumpet and *guitarrón* musicians to serenade a loved one. Lastly, on Sundays, if it doesn't rain, the small square becomes an animated open-air market, in the style of the renowned *Parisian marchés aux puces* (flea markets)" (*Viaja con tu Guía*, 2005: 36).

Yucatán:

" Books, encyclopedias, journals and Internet web pages have rightfully praised the fabulous and peculiar taste of Yucatan dishes, such as *cochinita pibil*, stuffed cheese, pork with beans, *poc-chuc*, *relleno negro*, venison *sic*, *salbutes*, *panuchos*, *papadzules*, and others of the many wonders of the gastronomic genius of the state" (*Rutas Turísticas*, 2006: 22).

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

When conceiving the cultural goods of a place as tourist attractions, as something typical or colorful, they are objectified and re-semanticized to such a point that the tourist loses "contact" with the human expressions that created them, as well as with the social and historical conditions that made them possible.

The tourist needs to take home "things" that will testify that he traveled, that he was in one of the desired places, amid the "typical" expressions of those spaces. And that is what those cultural goods become, "things" to be photographed by the tourist. The structuring of the tourism code is developed so that the tourist may adopt a passive attitude to what he sees, because he has left the direction of his actions and his perceptions in the hands of "connoisseurs". His questions are answered in guidebooks and those answers become true answers.

The fragmented experience of tourists, which is lived by following a program, continues, as mentioned, through the objects they purchase during their trip. As symbols of this practice, these symbols will confer him or her certain prestige before others when back home, as well as a justification of the trip just made. "Along with the thing to see, it acts as a goal of the trip, as social prestige. Labels play a decisive role in the calculation of the price of this merchandise, the trip—the attempt to free us from the commercial universe" (Enzensberger, 1965: 231).

These objects may be purchased in the destination or they might be articles distributed by the industry's agents, such as bags, decals, lighters, etc. In each of these cases the fetishist nature of the trip is manifest. One of the products that cannot be missing at home is a handicraft; in particular, the one inscribed with "Souvenir of...", with which the tourist may recognize it when integrating it into his home as an emblem to indicate he was in such a place. "Most of the objects with this identifying inscription are not bought from their producers nor chosen for an affective reason, such as having been interested in or understanding those who make them. They are purchased in markets or stores; frequently in a place unlike the one where they were made" (García Canclini, 1982:155).

When concluding the trip, the tourist will narrate the trip and reproduce the tourist discourse, thereby fulfilling two goals:

acquiring social prestige and justifying the trip, and, on the other hand, promoting the group which sold it to him. "Tourism is an industry where production and advertising have as sole response the fact that its clients are also their employees" (Enzensberger, 1965: 232).

It is likewise important to point out that tourist cultural goods are, practically speaking, derived from the classic conception of culture. As such, they are a finite, limitlessly ethnocentric and excluding summation where what should be visited and admired is hierarchized according to a structure associated with the political and commercial interests of governments and international tourism organizations, sold through images in different discourses.

In short, or rather, to continue with this line of thought, I will quote Marc Augé, "The impossible trip is the one we will never make. The one trip that would have made us discover new landscapes and new men, the one that would have opened up a space for new encounters. That happened sometime and, without doubt, some Europeans fleetingly experienced then what we would experience today if an indisputable sign proved to us the existence, somewhere in space, of living beings capable of communicating with us... Traveling, yes; let us travel, we should travel, but, especially, without doing tourism" (1977:15 and 16).

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